

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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NIC-01 EB-11 COME-00 INT-08 SCEM-02 SCI-06 TRSE-00

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INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KABUL

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AMCONSUL LAHORE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJ: OBSERVATIONS ON UNREST IN PUNJAB AND KARACHI

1. DEMONSTRATIONS AND ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND VANDALISM
IN PUNJAB AND KARACHI METROPOLITAN AREA FOR PAST
SEVERAL DAYS HAVE SERVED TO UNDERSCORE CONTINUED EXISTENCE
OF DEEP-SEATED AND ALMOST UNIVERSAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
TENSIONS IN PAKISTAN DESPITE PEOPLE'S PARTY REFORMS.
THIS MALAISE HAS BEEN MANIFESTED OPENLY AND VIOLENTLY ON
VARIOUS OCCASIONS SUCH AS THESE RECENT EVENTS IN COUNTRY'S
MAJOR PROVINCES.

2. WHILE ORIGINS OF DISTURBANCES DIFFERED SOMEWHAT IN
EACH REGION (STUDENT ASSERTION OF PRIVILEGED STATUS
VIS-A-VIS LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN PUNJAB AND CATALYTIC
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EFFECT ON VARIOUS DISGRUNTLED SEGMENTS OF KARACHI

POPULATION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PRICE INCREASES IN SPRAWLING KARACHI CITY AREA), DISTURBANCES IN BOTH AREAS DO POINT UP INTENSIFYING ECONOMIC WOES OF BHUTTO GOVERNMENT. PAKISTAN IS HIT FOR FIRST TIME IN RECENT MEMORY BY SIGNIFICANT INFLATION AND SHORTAGES OF BASIC COMMODITIES SUCH AS COOKING OIL AND KEROSENE. GOP RESPONSE HAS BEEN LARGELY POLITICAL: WARNINGS TO PRODUCERS AND DISTRIBUTORS; NATIONALIZATION OF VEGETABLE GHEE INDUSTRY; IMPLIED THREATS OF FURTHER NATIONALIZATION; AND EXHORTATIONS TO CONSUMERS TO CONSUME LESS AND WORKERS TO PRODUCE MORE.

3. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THIS APPROACH TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WAS EDITORIAL IN SEMI-OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT VOICE, PAKISTAN TIMES, DECEMBER 5. COMMENTING ON PUNJAB AND SIND DISTURBANCES, PAPER CONCLUDED BY REMARKING "IT IS CLEAR THAT MINOR PALLIATIVES OR STAPGAP ADJUSTMENTS TO REDUCE PUBLIC DISCONTENT OVER SHORTAGES OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES LIKE GHEE OR KEROSENE OIL, OR RISING PRICES OF FOODSTUFFS, OR INCREASING BURDEN ON VITAL SERVICES (LIKE CITY TRANSPORT) WILL NOT DO. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THERE MAY BE NO ALTERNATIVE EXCEPT TO ELIMINATE THE PRIVATE OPERATOR FROM THESE SPHERES AND STREAMLINE THE ENTIRE SYSTEM OF SUPPLIES AND SERVICES THROUGH A SUBSIDIZED PUBLIC SECTOR." ERGO, MORE NATIONALIZATION IS PANACEA SUGGESTED BY THIS INFLUENTIAL NEWS-PAPER.

4. ALTHOUGH IN KARACHI DISTURBANCES CENTERED AMONG ANTI-BHUTTO REFUGEE LOCALES AND WERE EXPLOITED BY RELIGIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES, DISCONTENT HAS NOT TAKEN SHARP POLITICAL FOCUS TO DATE BEYOND RESENTMENT AGAINST TRADITIONAL TARGET OF POLICE AND CUSTOMARY SOUTH ASIAN DESTRUCTION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT. AS WE HAVE COMMENTED BEFORE, BHUTTO'S POLITICAL OPPOSITION IS WEAK, DIVIDED AND INEPT WHILE BHUTTO IS USUALLY ONE STEP AHEAD OF PUBLIC OPINION AND INCIPIENT PROBLEMS. YET IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HE WILL ENCOUNTER FURTHER AND PERHAPS INCREASINGLY SERIOUS ECONOMIC-INSPIRED PUBLIC MANIFESTATIONS OF DISSATISFACTION IN COMING MONTHS.

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